## In the Claims

- 1. (Withdrawn) A method for making a preform from a polyester-based resin stored at ambient conditions, comprising the steps of:
- a) reducing the absorbed oxygen in the polyester-based resin by contacting the resin with an oxygen-depleted atmosphere;
- b) heating the polyester-based resin in an oxygen-depleted atmosphere to a temperature above the melting point until the polyester-based resin can be injection molded;
- c) creating a preform from the melt by injection molding in an oxygen-depleted atmosphere.
- 2. (Withdrawn) The method for making a preform as recited in Claim 1, wherein the drying step (a) occurs at a temperature between about 120°C and about 170°C.
- 3. (Withdrawn) The method for making a preform as recited in Claim 2, wherein steps (b) and (c) occur in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.
- 4. (Withdrawn) The method for making a preform as recited in Claim 2, wherein the drying step (a) occurs in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.
- 5. (Currently amended) A preform made using the method of Claim 1 a method for making a preform from a polyester-based resin stored at ambient conditions, the method comprising the steps of:

drying the polyester-based resin in an environment to reduce the absorbed oxygen in the polyester-based resin by introducing an inert gas into a drying hopper containing a supply of the polyester-based resin, wherein the inert gas contacts the polyester-based resin during drying of the polyester-based resin prior to a step of melting the polyester-based resin, the inert gas depleting oxygen attached to the polyester-based resin in the drying hopper;

heating the polyester-based resin to a temperature above the melting point until the polyester-based resin can be injection molded;

creating a preform from the molten poly-ester based resin.

- 6. (Currently amended) A preform made using the method of Claim 2 as in Claim 5, wherein the drying step occurs at a temperature between about 120°C and about 170°C.
- 7. (Currently amended) A preform made using the method of Claim 3 as in Claim 5, wherein the heating and creating steps occur in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.
- 8. (Currently amended) A preform made using the method of Claim 4 as in Claim 5, wherein the drying step occurs in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.
- 9. (Withdrawn) The method for making a preform as recited in Claim 2, further comprising the step, following (c), of blow molding a bottle from the preform.
- 10. (Withdrawn) A method for making a preform from a polyester-based resin stored at ambient conditions, comprising the steps of:
- a) contacting the polyester-based resin with an oxygen-depleted atmosphere at a temperature between about 120°C and about 170°C for a predetermined time;
- b) heating the polyester-based resin in an oxygen-depleted atmosphere to a temperature above the melting point until the polyester-based resin can be injection molded; and
  - c) creating a preform from the melt by injection molding.
- 11. (Withdrawn) A method for making a preform as recited in Claim 10, wherein step (a) occurs in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.
- 12. (Withdrawn) A method for making a preform as recited in Claim 10, wherein step (b) occurs in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.

13. (Currently amended) A preform made using [the method of Claim 10] <u>a</u> method for making a preform from a polyester-based resin stored at ambient conditions, the method comprising the steps of:

drying a supply of polyester-based resin by contacting the supply of polyester-based resin, prior to heating and molding, with an oxygen-depleted atmosphere at a temperature between about 120°C and about 170°C for a predetermined time to form oxygen-reduced, polyester-based resin;

heating the oxygen-reduced, polyester-based resin to a temperature above the melting point until the oxygen-reduced, polyester-based resin can be injection molded; and

<u>creating a preform from the molten oxygen-reduced, polyester-based resin by injection molding.</u>

- 14. (Currently amended) A preform made [using the method of Claim 11] <u>as in Claim 13</u>, wherein the drying step occurs in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.
- 15. (Currently amended) A preform made [using the method of Claim 12] as in Claim 13, wherein the heating and creating steps occur in an atmosphere substantially devoid of oxygen.
- 16. (Withdrawn) An apparatus for making a preform from a polyester-based resin stored at ambient conditions, comprising:
  - a) a drying hopper having an outlet;
- b) an injection molding machine receiving polyester-based resin from the drying hopper outlet; and
  - c) means for injecting an inert gas, connected to the drying hopper near the outlet.
- 17. (Withdrawn) An apparatus as recited in Claim 16, wherein the means for injecting an inert gas is a gas line and a pressure regulator.
- 18. (New) A preform made as in Claim 5, wherein the drying step occurs in an oxygen-depleted atmosphere.

- 19. (New) A preform made as in Claim 5, wherein, during the heating step, the polyester-based resin is in contact with inert gas migrated from the drying hopper.
- 20. (New) A preform made as in Claim 5, wherein the drying step comprises introducing an inert gas to the supply of polyester-based prior to the heating step, and wherein during the heating step, the polyester-based resin is contacted with inert gas migrated from its introduction during the drying step.